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Fukuda Teiichi (1923-96), known to the world by his pen name Shiba Ryōtarō, is generally regarded to be the most influential novelist-cum-historian in Japan in the latter half of the twentieth century.

When Shiba died in March 1996, he was sorely missed by many of his compatriots. He is remembered as a national writer (*kokumin sakka*) and as a cultured man of great erudition, who had written so many masterpieces full of historical insights. His contribution to postwar Japan's culture has been compared to that of André Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus in twentieth-century France.

Many of Shiba's works were concerned with people who lived to the best of their ability at turbulent times in Japanese history. He focused in particular on the late Tokugawa and Meiji years, during which Japan transformed herself, to the world's amazement, from a self-imposed isolated feudal state of some 260 domains into a unified and modern nation. Through his works, some figures who until then had been barely mentioned in Japanese historical textbooks were rescued to the front stage of history and became idols for many readers. Typical of them was Sakamoto Ryōma (1835-67). Before Shiba's masterpiece *Ryōma ga yuku* (Ryoma Goes) appeared between 1963 and 1965, few people in Japan were aware of the role this "man of high purpose" (*shishi*) from the Tosa domain on Shikoku island had played in the political movement that culminated in the Meiji Restoration. Whereas most *shishi* in the anti-*bakufu* faction took it for granted that "bullets were the only means by which the *bakufu* could be overthrown," Ryōma conceived that "if one were able to see things from a vantage point a meter higher than ordinary people, then there would be nothing in this life that could only be resolved by one way; as from that vantage point one would be able to find, from different perspectives several solutions to the problem." Ryōma later played a crucial role as an intermediary in the eventual restoration of imperial rule, commonly known as the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Yet, when the Meiji government was created, he adamantly refused to serve in the new government, saying: "It was not because I wanted to become an official that I overthrew the Bakufu. . . . I only wished to open the door of history so that Japan might be able to advance in the future." Shortly afterwards, he was assassinated by an extremist group in Kyoto. Owing to the influence of *Ryōma ga yuku*, Ryōma's name and his role as a *shishi* who had selflessly sacrificed his life for Japan's rejuvenation are referred to with respect whenever people talk about the eventful years prior to the Meiji Restoration.

Before Japan experienced a sybaritic period of "bubble economy" in the late 1980s, Shiba was among the first in Japan to express his apprehensions for his country's fortunes. His immediate concern was the current state of the inflated real estate market in Japan and the investment fever gripping the nation. To him, this alarming situation was more an ethical issue than an economic one (Bungei Shunjū, 110). Prior to Shiba's death in 1996, the bubble burst and Japan's economy stagnated, a situation which had been incurred, in the words of

one writer, “by her own affluence” (*ibid.*, 60). Even more concerned about Japan’s bleak prospects in this new economic atmosphere, Shiba called for restoring Meiji values to deal with the myriad problems awaiting his country in a globalizing world.

This essay will focus on three questions: (1) Why did Shiba believe it was necessary for Japan to reinvigorate Meiji values in a global age? (2) What were these values in Shiba’s view? and (3) What was the impact of his ideas?

I

To Shiba, because Japan’s economic success following her defeat in World War II had been achieved by tying herself closely to the American open market economy, it was only natural to assume that Japan should open her market to a level comparable to that of the U.S. He saw that if Japan’s economic growth was to be maintained in a globalizing world, she had no choice but to open her labor market on a far greater scale. Giving lip service to “internationalization” (*kokusaika*) was not sufficient. If given the choice, the Japanese people would prefer their country to remain a closed society, but the time was running out for this policy. Shiba warned that avoiding these issues was not an option because it would lead to a reduction in Japan’s economic power to that of a medium-sized economy. Such an approach would not be supported by the Japanese populace and would be perceived as running away—a shameful response according to *samurai* values which had been implanted in the national psyche since the rise of the *samurai* class in the late twelfth century.

But internationalization meant new challenges. In the process of removing trade and immigration barriers would Japanese society lose its unique character? In other words, would diversity cause Japan to become a spineless entity and eventually cease to exist? Or would Japan be able to draw on her unique intellectual and moral characteristics as the U.S. had done early in her history using Protestantism to nurture a unifying strength in the face of diversity? Shiba saw this as the only feasible alternative for Japan. The task was thus to reclaim from the nation’s past unique ethical elements that could be used as a foundation to instill pride in the Japanese populace so that Japan might be able to stand up to the internalizing effects of diversity. According to Shiba, the backbone that Japan should rely on in her internationalization was to be found nowhere but in what might be understood as *bushidō* (the way of the *samurai*) and/or as the spirit of the Edoites” (*Edokko kokoroiki*), that emerged as a commonly shared set of values from those who moved to Edo (presently Tokyo) from other parts of the country during the Tokugawa period. The spirit of receptivity inherent in these values would eventually fuel the drive for the adoption of Western values during the Meiji period.

In Shiba’s opinion, Japan’s emergence into a vibrant modern state had not been accompanied by a corresponding leading role (*shuyaku*) in the world community and contemporary civilization—a role that has been dominated by Western nations. Thus, the question to him was whether or not Japan, as a “full-grown member of the international community,” was able to share in looking after (*mendō ga mirareru*) it, and would Japan be able to set the standards for contemporary civilization? He believed that although Japan had a distinctive culture, she had not reached a position where aspects of that culture could be exported to other nations as universal values.

To accomplish these goals, Shiba suggested the nation's philosophical underpinning for Japan should be found in the philosophy of the Kegon school (Chinese *Huayan*, Sanskrit *Avatamsaka*), which was introduced to Japan from China in the Nara period (710-784) and since then had been integrated into the life of the Japanese people as their "everyday wisdom" (*zoku-tetsugaku*). In the Kegon philosophy, "there is no notion that there are absolute beings like in Christianity. It views the world in relative terms, in which all is harmonized in the essence of the Light. Apart from paying respect to the Light, it conceives all beings as interdependent and everything is interconnected; from the tiny level of an atom or a molecule to the boundlessness of the universe, all beings are reciprocally and mutually dependent on one another for their existence." This spirit is reflected in the Seinen Kaigai Kyōryokutai (Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers, JOCV), whether or not its dedicated members are conscious of this tradition.

At present, however, Shiba maintained that Japan was not ready to undertake this task, as being a civilization carrier (*bunmei no ninaite*) was a role for which Japan had no experience. The Japanese people first had to educate themselves to be ready for it.

II

In order to meet the challenge of a global world, Shiba believe Japan needed to reinvigorate the *samurai* ethos (*samurai kishitsu*, on other occasions he also used other terms such as *bushidō*, *shikon*, or "the spirit of the Edoites") which had wavered in present-day Japan (Shiba 1994, 73). To him, it was the *samurai* ethos, found not only among the *samurai*, but also among the townspeople and farmers in the Tokugawa period, that had sustained those who dedicated their lives to Japan's emergence as a modern state during the late Tokugawa and early Meiji years. Shiba succinctly summarized the relationship between the Tokugawa culture and the Meiji Restoration: "It is difficult to describe the *samurai* (*bushi*) in a single word. During those [late Tokugawa] years, their self-discipline (*jiritsu*) and aesthetic sense (*biishiki*) were infused with spirit and vigor. It seems to me that the Meiji Restoration bore no resemblance to any of the revolutions that took place in France, Italy and Russia. The striking difference being it was a revolution undertaken by the *samurai*, who should be seen as the greatest cultural asset of the Tokugawa three-hundred years" (Tanizawa, 113). Just as *samurai* values had sustained Meiji leaders during the Restoration, Shiba believed that they would also uphold the contemporary Japanese in their efforts to address issues arising from globalization.

What exactly were the "self-discipline" and "aesthetic sense" of the *samurai* that Shiba singled out in the above statement? With respect to self-discipline, citing the classic dictum from the *Great Learning* of "being watchful of oneself when alone," Shiba explained that during the Tokugawa period, the *samurai* took this dictum as praxis. The *samurai* insistence on constant self-discipline, in Shiba's opinion, could be compared to the spirit of moral and religious earnestness that motivated English Puritans in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Shiba 1992, 246-247).

So far as the *samurai*'s "aesthetic sense" was concerned, its extreme expression was to be observed in the ritual of *seppuku* (self-immolation). Shiba described the purport of this grisly practice: "The samurai's vanity was to be found in the last moment of his life: *seppuku*. How

beautifully a *seppuku* was performed was viewed as the most eloquent manifestation of the man he had been. For that reason, before a *samurai* son was to celebrate his coming of age (*gempuku*), he was meticulously taught about the etiquette of *seppuku*. I do not imply that there was a tradition in Japan that made death light, but by controlling at will the most difficult thing to overcome for humankind, i.e. the fear of death, the *samurai* attempted to bring forth a psychological tension, aesthetics, and real freedom" (*Ibid.*, 133).

On a more general level, the *samurai's* sense of aesthetics was well manifest through numerous heroes in Shiba's works, most notably Sakamoto Ryōma (1835-67), Takasugi Shinsaku (1839-69), Hijikata Toshizō, Ōmura Masujirō (1824-69), Saigō Takamori (1827-77), and Kawai Tsugunosuke (1827-68). All of these men lived their lives to the fullest during the eventful years before and after the Meiji Restoration. In both life and in the face of death, they all could be called *isagiyoī*, a term that possessed several connotations underlying the quality of a *samurai*: 1) pure (*kiyoī*), refreshing (*sugasugashii*) [in their action and thought]; 2) integrity, incorruptible (*seiren keppaku*; abbreviated *renketsu*); 3) no regret (*miren ga nai*), composed (*warubirenai*), and brave (*isamashii*) [in adversity and even in the face of death] (*Nihongodaijiten*, 10; *Kōjien*, 127). The heroes in Shiba's historical novels have been idolized by his readers precisely because they were seen to have led exemplary lives and lived truly to these criteria.

While the *samurai* ethos was still well and alive in the Meiji era (1868-1912), a new set of values were adopted from the West. They were seen as parts of a whole that epitomized universal values; to excel in them was to be civilized. Since self-defense was the principal drive behind Japan's adoption of Western civilization, "to be civilized" in the Western sense was viewed as an effective measure for the preservation of Japan's sovereignty. It is significant that Shiba extolled not only the *samurai* ethos but also these newly-adopted values. Let us look into a few typical ones to discern the reasons for Shiba's call for their reinvigoration.

- *Shōjiki* (honesty): If "one has to single out one quality that would bring happiness to daily life," Shiba maintained, "it must be none other than *shōjiki*." As the saying "*Shōjiki wa Hotoke no moto*" (literally, "Honesty is the first step to become enlightened")¹ had been used by the Buddhist practitioners in the Kamakura period (1192-1333), Shiba held that the Japanese word "*shōjiki*" must have existed for over 700 years. In Tokugawa Japan, the *samurai* officials had been required "to have integrity and to be upright (*renchoku*)" but not necessarily to be "*shōjiki*," since their principal governing guideline had been the Confucian maxim "it is possible to make the people follow the teaching of the sovereign, but it is impossible to explain its details to each of them." Nonetheless, "*shōjiki*" had been regarded as a virtue among the merchants, artisans, and servants. As its concept had already existed in Japan, "*shōjiki*" became a perfect translation for "honesty" when this term was introduced in the Meiji era. Together with the flow of Western ideas to Japan, "honesty" gained prominence. "In practice, until the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05)," in Shiba's view, "those in charge of governing the country displayed a considerably high level of honesty, without which it would have been impossible for them to produce a glorious era known as the Meiji miracle." Shiba explained that during the 1930s, however, as the Japanese state became "dishonest" (*fushōjiki*) to the people, this "dishonesty" had quickly led the nation to a catastrophe. In contrast to the Meiji Constitution that had given birth

to Japan as a modern state, argued Shiba, the postwar Constitution gave rise to individuality and it totally depended upon the awareness of every individual. "Without the honesty of every individual," and "if those who represented government and the politicians were dishonest," he asserted, "Japan would be at stake" (Shiba 1994a, 22-26).

- *Jijo* (self-help) and *dokuritsu* (independence): "Self-help" and "independence" were the two popular catchwords in Meiji Japan. Most instrumental in the dissemination of the idea of independence was undoubtedly Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834-1901), who has generally been seen as the *philosophe* and the "founder" of modern Japan. Fukuzawa was crystal clear about the necessity of adopting modern Western civilization: "The way in which to preserve [Japan's] independence cannot be sought anywhere except in civilization. The only reason for making the people in our country today advance toward civilization is to preserve our country's independence." (Fukuzawa 1973, 193). In Fukuzawa's view, national independence could not be achieved without independent individuals (*isshin dokuritsu shite, ikkoku dokuritsu*). Previously, "*dokuritsu*" had been used in a negative sense, implying "isolation." The term was given a new life when it was used to translate the English word "independence," which was defined by Fukuzawa as: "Referring to the spirit of governing oneself, without thinking of relying on others." Fukuzawa discussed the need for Japan to adopt the spirit of independence in his book *Gakumon no susume* (An Encouragement of Learning), published in 1872.

Nakamura Masanao (1832-1891) also played an important role in the dissemination of the spirit of independence in Japan through his translation of Samuel Smiles' *Self-help* (published in 1870). According to Shiba, the spirit of independence and self-help in Fukuzawa's *Gakumon no susume* and Nakamura's translation captured the imagination of Meiji youth and the books were longtime best sellers. To illustrate, Shiba cited the case of Kawaji Toshiyoshi (1834-79), a man from Satsuma (presently Kagoshima prefecture), who had gone to France to study the police system and upon his return was entrusted with the task of organizing a new police system for Meiji Japan. When the Satsuma Rebellion broke out in his home province in 1877, Kawaji was put in a most difficult position as he was to take part in putting down the rebellion. To encourage those from his home province fighting on his side, Kawaji said: "Born as human being, but without having the right of self-help and independence and thus entrusting one's life and one's interest to others, would that be any different from the fastened cows and horses?" (Shiba 1994a, 176-177).

- *Gimu* (duty): Newly coined in early Meiji Japan to convey the English concept of duty, *gimu* was, in Shiba's opinion, indeed a brilliant translation. The Chinese character "*gi*" in this translated term "denotes the sense of righteousness, or that which goes beyond calculation," embedded in the original term. In prewar Japan *gimu* had been used, however, "with an emphasis on the restraints with which individuals were bound by the state" as seen in the "Three major duties of the citizens" (*Kokumin no sandai gimu*): liability to taxation (*nōzei no gimu*), military service (*heieki no gimu*), and compulsory education (*kyōiku no gimu*). In other words, Shiba saw that in practice, *gimu* did not convey the rich, invigorated, and spontaneous nuance of the English "duty" found in Horacio Nelson's last words at Trafalgar: "I have done my duty." Shiba contended that it was time for Japan to reconsider the meaning of *gimu* in her search for ideas to break away from her reluctance to join "the global village" (*chikyūmura*) as a full member. (*Ibid.*, 221-266).

Seeing these Meiji virtues (*bitoku*) wavering among the younger generation and the unhealthy tight connection between the politicians and their constituents in present-day Japan, Shiba asked: "Is it not necessary to go back to the pioneer spirit of the Meiji era?"

Toward the end of the 1980s, in a Japanese-language textbook for the sixth grade students, Shiba wrote an essay entitled "*Nijūisseiki ni ikiru kimitachi e*" (To Those of You Who Live in the Twenty-first Century). It must have required him a lot of thought to complete this brief two-page essay, as he disclosed elsewhere that it had taken him longer to write it than it would have to finish a novel. Evidently he had anticipated that the end of his life was approaching, as he wrote at the outset "certainly I will not be able to see the twenty-first century." He offered several pieces of advice to the students. With respect to nature, "as human beings are part of nature," he wished them "to adopt a receptive approach"—that would be his hope for the twenty-first century and also his expectation of them. So far as the students were concerned, he wished them to nurture an independent spirit, practising self-discipline yet being considerate (*yasashii*) to others. If this disposition were firmly engrained in themselves, the same disposition would spring out when they came into contact with other nations. Just as "the *samurai* during the Kamakura period had been trained to be dependable (*tanomoshii*)," he urged the students to cultivate themselves to become dependable. This essay represents a succinct summary of the essential ideas he had developed in his career, providing a blueprint for the younger generations to equip them with the values necessary for them to meet what he saw as the relentless challenges stemming from an increasingly globalized world.

III

It is significant to note the enormous influence that Shiba's works left on his readers, including a good number of incumbent politicians and prominent cultural and economic leaders. The late Prime Minister Obuchi Keizō, for example, said that *Ryōma ga yuku* (Ryōma Goes) was the first novel by Shiba he read. Obuchi recalled: "It was in 1963, when I was first elected to the Lower House. I was high-spirited, ready to dedicate myself to Japanese politics. Probably I was inspired to be like Ryōma who escaped from his domain to exert himself in the interests of the country. I was just fascinated by Ryōma..., who, as [the writer] Inoue Hisashi observes, was 'brave and pure, utterly honest, and not crafty or complicated.' These traits, which ought to be called typically Japanese, are fading among contemporary Japanese. For this reason Shiba's works gave me boundless nostalgia" (*Bungei Shunjū*, 110). Obuchi also concurred with Shiba's concern for the land question: "In *Fujinshō* (Vignettes of Life), a posthumous manuscript, Shiba touched upon the bubble economy issue and stated: 'The land in Japan is what the people are to rely on. To engage in pursuits such as land speculation to create a frantic climate is unquestionably an ethical issue rather than an economic one.' His perception was penetrating indeed." (BG, 110). Echoing Shiba's vision for Japan's future generation, in his policy speech to the 145th Session of the Diet on January 19, 1999, Obuchi said: "It is clear to all that the future will be born by the younger generation. What we as adults can do for the younger generation who will bear our society forward in the future, is no less than to do our utmost to build various bridges to the 21st Century, while at the same time, as novelist Ryōtarō Shiba once said, we must foster an environment in which the bearers of the future will be of jovial spirit, stern with themselves and thoughtful of others."²

The current Prime Minister, Koizumi Jun'ichirō, writing in 1996, reminisced that he began reading Shiba's works in his university years. "The first book by Shiba that I read," wrote Koizumi, "was *Kunitori monogatari* (The Tale of the Warring States) which, in a way, really changed the course of my life." He indicated that he remained an avid reader of Shiba's writings, through which he began to see parallels between present-day Japan and circumstances in the late Tokugawa and early Meiji eras during the later half of the nineteenth century. As he wrote: "Even now, I still read over Shiba's works from time to time. The work that I have reread most lately was *Yō ni sumu hibi*" [literally "Daily life," a short novel that Shiba wrote in the early 1970s dealing with Yoshida Shōin and Takasugi Shinsaku—two prominent pioneers of the movement that led to the Meiji Restoration]. As compared to my previous reading, this time I feel that I acquired a more profound appreciation. On second thought, the present day is not dissimilar from the late Tokugawa – Meiji Restoration eras. The Satsuma and Chōshū domains, which were hostile [to the contemporary Tokugawa Shogunate government], decided to unite in the Satchō coalition, just like the coalition government of the Liberal, Socialist and Sakigake parties [of the present day]. In much the same way, [at present] a great reform is being called for. Against that background, when I read and ponder over every word by Shiba-sensei, naturally, I can see richer nuances in his work." (Bungei Shunjū, 115).

After becoming Prime Minister, Koizumi drew on an episode from the early Meiji era that exemplified Meiji values in order to provide a motif for his own reform policies. In his policy speech delivered on May 7, 2001, he referred to the story of "*Kome hyappō*" (One hundred *hyō* of rice) in Nagaoka domain, the home domain of Kawai Tsugunosuke—the hero in Shiba's novel *Tōge* (Mountain Pass). During the early years of the Meiji era, the Nagaoka domain suffered under straitened circumstances. When it received a donation of 100 *hyō* (approximately equivalent to 7,200 litres) of rice, people were so pleased. Had this amount of rice been consumed, however, it would have lasted only a few days. Kobayashi Torasaburō, the domainal leader at the time, decided to use it as a school endowment for educating the youth. As a result, Nagaoka was able to produce many talents in later years. "To bear today's ordeal for the betterment of the future was the spirit of *Kome hyappō*," said Koizumi in his policy speech, "and this is precisely what we need in carrying out the reform."

Sakakibara Eisuke, Chief of the International Finance Department in the Ministry of Finance, recalled that when he was teaching Japanese Economics at Harvard University as a visiting professor, he spent most of his spare time reading Shiba's work. He acknowledged that Shiba's works helped him to see the tumultuous events in Japan in perspective and guided him in charting his future path. In the face of "the rough wave of globalization," the solution provided in Shiba's article "Should We Make a Commitment?" appeared to him as the only feasible course of action. (*Bungei Shunjū*, 117).

Second, Shiba was able to offer a coherent interpretation of the issues facing Japan in a global age and set them within historical and comparative perspectives. He was also able to suggest sensitive measures to deal with them. Shiba once stated: "I love postwar Japan so much such that if I should have to defend it, I would risk my life to do so" (Shiba 1998, 239). It must have been because of his frustration during his wartime experience and this love for postwar Japan that in the last ten years of his life, Shiba focused on writing essays, coalescing

the insights he had acquired during his writing career. These essays were later published in volumes such as *Meiji to iu kokka* (Meiji as a State), *Shōwa to iu kokka* (Showa as a State), *Kono kuni no katachi* (The Forms of This Country), *Fujinshō* (Vignettes of Life), etc. which enjoyed enormous popularity.

Realizing the possible dangers of globalization and the necessity of cultivating relevant values and ethics, he proposed a course of action which recognized that Japan had no choice but to play a greater role in the international community if she were to survive as a significant power. But at the same time, he was keenly aware of the negative aspects of globalization and thus his vision for Japan was a realistic type of internationalization tailored to Japan's cultural and economic realities. Consequently he called for the restoration of Meiji values to provide an intellectual and ethical underpinning to Japanese society and, eventually, to export as a universally acceptable standard. For all his wisdom and insights as an historian, writer, and educator, it is no surprise that Shiba was referred to as the *philosophe* or a compass of Japan. (Yoshida, 120).

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NOTES

¹ In practice its meaning is close to the English saying "Honesty is the best policy."

² Provisional translation provided by The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Accessed at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/1999/1/119-2.html>.